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CIA cracks door
at headquarters

Washington (Reuter)—The Central Intelligence Agency, once so secretive that no road signs pinpointed its headquarters location, is making a determined effort to win friends and influence people among the American public.

This radical policy change was ordered by its director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, with the approval of President Carter.

They want to better the CIA's image, battered by its involvement in past years in foreign assassination attempts and questionable dealings such as experiments with LSD and other mind-altering drugs on Americans without their knowledge.

Now, the CIA is willing to open its doors partially to reporters and others. A recent example was the visit by about 100 members and guests of the Sigma Delta Chi journalism society to CIA offices at Langley, Va., near Washington.

Those attending were welcomed with smiles and handshakes, given a briefing of the CIA's operations and allowed to question three officials for nearly one hour.

The evening ended with coffee and cookies in the CIA's "Rendezvous Room."

Security has not been abandoned, however. Those attending had to submit their names two weeks in advance and no foreigners—or cameras and tape recorders—were permitted.

"We are trying a new openness policy," Herbert Hetu, the CIA's director of public affairs, told the visitors. "We want advice on how to better serve the media."

Mr. Hetu was brought into the agency, after 27 years in the Navy, by Admiral Turner to expand public affairs activities. He said he is often frustrated because security reasons prevent him from revealing many of the agency's successes or correcting some of the errors he sees in news reports.

Although the CIA has sometimes given information to selected reporters on a background basis, the official policy has been to answer all questions with "no comment."

Mr. Hetu said that had been changed. "We now try to answer as many questions as we can," he said. "If we can't, we try to say why not."

One of the first questions asked at the meeting was the size of the CIA's budget. The questioner was told this was classified.

Mr. Hetu said the CIA wanted to get away from the British attitude toward intelligence—an apparent reference to the Official Secrets Act that prohibits all reports about MI-5, the British intelligence agency.

Paul Chretien, another CIA official, emphasized that the CIA is part of a team with the departments of State and Defense. He said 95 per cent of the agency's budget is spent on intelligence gathering and analysis.

Much of the information obtained in foreign countries is from foreign nationals working for the United States, he said, adding: "We are not so much spies, but recruiters of spies."

Although the CIA likes to play down the use of James Bond-type gadgets, Mr. Chretien demonstrated a special paper that dissolves in water or can be eaten. He did both.

Mr. Hetu said it was against agency policy for CIA officers—they are not called agents, he said—to pose as journalists, clergymen or Peace Corps members as a cover.

The guests were not allowed to tour the headquarters building, although the CIA hopes to begin limited public tours in the near future.

However, on the way to the reception after the question-and-answer period, they were able to walk down part of the main corridor under the close watch of guards and officials.

Parts of the building look like any other government office. There are cafeterias, a library and bulletin boards with notices of cars and homes for sale and intramural sports activities.